The Mealtime Miracle for Weight Loss Success

In the last lesson, you discovered the benefits of taking a break from your diet. But even when you're taking a break, continuing to lose weight could be as easy as watching the clock. Today's lesson explains the importance of regular mealtimes.

A recent study found that adults who eat on a regular schedule have healthier diets overall.

Researchers found that college students who ate at about the same time each day consumed more vegetables and fruit, and less sugar and fast food. The effects were even more impressive when they packed their own lunch. The findings reinforce previous theories about the importance of contextual eating cues.

Eating context refers to the physical, social, and psychological environment in which you dine. Streamline your diet with these tips for maintaining regular mealtimes and other helpful habits.

How to Stick to Regular Mealtimes

1. **Start with breakfast. Have your first meal within the first hour after you wake up.** If you don't care for traditional breakfast items, try being more creative. Have a bowl of soup or a salad with grilled fish.

2. **Hold family dinners.** Share the benefits of healthy eating with your loved ones. Create a consistent dinnertime that works for your schedule. Keep in mind that we tend to eat more when dining in groups, but stimulating conversation can be even more rewarding than anything on your plate.

3. **Master quick recipes.** Meals don't have to be time consuming. Feast on sandwiches or hummus with cut vegetables.

4. **Cook and freeze.** For heartier fare, cook in batches and freeze individual portions. That way you'll have chili or lasagna in minutes.

5. **Snack strategically.** Does lunchtime seem too far away? Sip a smoothie with juice and kale or pack yogurt and baby carrots to take with you to the office. **A small and balanced snack can sustain you so you can hold out until your next meal.**

6. **Dine at home.** Whether you prefer fast food or fancy restaurants, eating out tends to make you eat more. Save money and calories by enjoying more home-cooked meals.

7. **Play host.** Holidays and entertaining can interfere with your diet. Take control by offering your hospitality so you can predict meal times and include lighter options on the menu.

How to Use Other Contextual Eating Cues

1. **Sit down.** Eating on the go makes it easy to lose track of how many calories you're taking in. Pull up a chair and dine sitting down.

2. **Turn off the TV.** Similarly, you can polish off a whole bag of chips before you know it when you're watching Mad Men or browsing the internet. **Pay attention to your food.** You'll probably eat less and enjoy it more.

3. **Set the table.** Decorate your dining area in a way that makes you want to slow down and savor your meals. Buy a pretty tablecloth and use your good dishes. Create a centerpiece with fresh flowers from your garden or candles from a thrift shop.

4. **Practice relaxation.** You probably know that feeling blue can make you wolf down too much ice cream, but did you realize that being excited can have the same effect***?*** Cultivate a neutral mind by meditating or taking a walk.

5. **Choose supportive friends.** We tend to behave like those around us. Hang out with friends who eat lots of vegetables and visit the gym frequently.

6. **Keep a diary.** Each of us has our own triggers that can sabotage our good intentions. **Writing down what you eat and what was going on at the time will help you to spot your weak spots and develop effective strategies.**

Regular mealtimes play an essential role in managing your eating context. Once you develop simple habits that support positive choices, you'll be able to eat a nutritious diet and watch your weight with less effort and more success.

Another effective habit for cutting calories during your meals is eating slower to give your body time to feel full before you're at the point where you overeat. The next lesson shows you techniques you can use to eat slower.

Here's what you need to do today:

Begin a regular dinner time at your house. Set a beautiful table, turn off the TV, and savor your food. Make family dinners a priority for your family. Go through your schedules to find a time that works best for all family members.